STARTING POINT NEWSLETTER

Trump's immigration crackdown has targeted Brazilian communities in Massachusetts. Here's how they got here.

The story of how so many Brazilians came to live in the state helps explain why several have been at the center of recent high-profile ICE detentions

By Ian Prasad Philbrick Globe Staff, Updated October 22, 2025, 6:21 a.m.

A student raised a Brazilian flag outside Milford High School in Milford, Mass. on June 2, following the detention of Marcelo Gomes Da Silva by ICE. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF

Good morning. After the high-profile ICE detentions of Brazilians in Massachusetts, we're explaining how so many Brazilians came to live here in the first place.

But first, here's what else is going on:

Graham Platner, the outsider Democrat running for US Senate in Maine, pledged to remove a tattoo that resembles a Nazi skull and crossbones, saying he got it while drunk years ago and wasn't aware of the symbolism. A campaign official who resigned last week accused Platner of knowing "damn well what it means" and failing to remove it sooner. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders said he still supports Platner.

President Trump wants the Justice Department to pay him $230 million in damages for investigating his ties to Russia and handling of classified documents, an unprecedented demand. Officials Trump installed, including some who defended him in court, may get to authorize any settlement.

The Cambridge City Council voted to raise commercial property taxes by 22 percent to help cover the city's nearly $1 billion operating budget. Some small business owners say the steep increase will hit them hard.

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TODAY'S STARTING POINT

On May 31, federal immigration agents detained an 18-year-old Milford High School student on his way to volleyball practice. In September, agents arrested a 16-year-old and a 19-year-old in the same town. And this month, ICE detained an Everett 13-year-old and sent him more than 500 miles away to Virginia.

In all four cases, the teenagers were Brazilian.

Brazilians, documented and not, make up one of Massachusetts' largest immigrant communities. At least 140,000 call the state home, second only to Florida. The story of how so many came to live here helps explain why several have been at the center of high-profile immigration arrests during the Trump presidency — and what those detentions could mean for their community's future in the state.

Distant origins

Conflict helped bring Massachusetts and Brazil together. During World War II, Massachusetts companies mined Brazilian mica for use in radio equipment. Brazilians who visited the state discovered they could make a year's salary in a few months, said Alvaro Lima, director of research for the Boston Planning Department who has studied Massachusetts' Brazilian population with the Instituto Diáspora Brasil, a nonprofit. "It became that idea that there was this place where you could immigrate and have a better life."

But an economic disaster really got things going. The military dictatorship that ruled Brazil until 1985 "left the country in shambles," said Lima. By the end of the decade, tens of thousands of Brazilians had arrived in Eastern Massachusetts, fleeing unemployment and rampant inflation. "Brazilians finding niche in area," a Globe headline reported in 1989. They quickly began to shape the local culture, playing soccer at BU, running stores in Allston, and celebrating Brazilian independence with late-night dances.

Many of the new arrivals were young men who worked in construction and sent remittances back to their families. Others soon followed. Two waves of migration in the 2000s culminated during the pandemic, when a surge of Brazilians sought relief from Brazil's COVID-battered economy.

Today, Massachusetts' Brazilian population has more women and is relatively young. Many work in construction, restaurants, and transportation, contributing around $8 billion to the state's economy in 2022. More than half aren't US citizens.

Becoming targets

The Brazilian community's growth and visibility seem to have drawn heightened scrutiny as federal immigration officials crack down on Massachusetts. Like two of the teens whose cases made headlines, more than a fifth of Brazilians here are under 18. Everett is home to the second-largest share of the state's Brazilian population, and about 16 percent of Milford residents identify as Brazilian.

Ironically, many Brazilians are also politically and socially conservative. President Trump more than tripled his share of the Brazilian American vote last year compared to 2016, one survey found. The only known former member of Congress with Brazilian heritage is George Santos, a Republican expelled in 2023 whose prison sentence Trump commuted last week.

Yet many Brazilians here have been taken aback by the administration's aggression. "I have talked to folks that are very conservative that are very shocked with what is happening," Lima said. Some fear leaving their homes or plan to leave the US. An exodus could hollow out the Massachusetts cities they have helped revitalize.

What's next?

ICE quickly freed two of the Brazilian teens it arrested earlier this year. A third, 19-year-old João Marciano do Carmo, was in a Mississippi detention facility as of last week. And the 13-year-old's case is ongoing.

Agents detained the boy, a seventh-grader, on Oct. 9 after Everett police arrested him with a large knife following a tip about a threat against another student. ICE moved him

to a facility in Vermont before a lawyer could petition for his release, then to a juvenile center facility in Virginia.

But there's plenty we don't know. The administration says the boy had a gun, which Everett officials deny. And legal experts have accused Trump officials of breaking juvenile privacy laws by publicly disclosing the boy's identity and claiming he has an "extensive rap sheet." A judge has ordered that he receive a bond hearing before an immigration judge, which is scheduled for today.

Read more about immigration:

ICE raids are deterring immigrants from buying homes in Greater Boston.
ICE deferred the removal of a Guatemalan longtime dairy worker in Vermont for a year after her boss described the woman and her family as critical to the farm's operations.

🧩 **5 Down:** Den | ☔ **65°** Wet, then sunny

POINTS OF INTEREST

Construction vehicles dismantled part of the White House yesterday. JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The people's house? Demolition crews continued to tear down part of the White House's East Wing to build a ballroom Trump ordered, outraging preservationists. "They're destroying that history forever," one expert said. (WashPost)

Women's sports: After flubbing its rollout, can Legacy FC, Boston's women's pro soccer team, get it together? And the city won one of the first four franchises in the Women's Pro Baseball League, which is set to begin play next year.

Money in politics: A federal court in Boston will soon hear a case over a Maine law limiting super PAC donations. It could reshape campaign finance rules nationwide — or backfire.

Costly collar: The man suspected of stabbing and seriously injuring former Fall River mayor William A. Flanagan on Monday also faces charges for allegedly assaulting police officers as they arrested him yesterday.

Never mind: Paul Ingrassia, Trump's pick to lead a federal watchdog agency, withdrew from consideration after Politico revealed his racist texts and several Republican senators said they wouldn't support him.

Trump vs. higher ed: Seven of nine universities — including Dartmouth, Brown, and MIT — have rejected signing an administration "compact" that would give them priority for federal funding if they make policy changes Trump favors.

Repeat offender: A Jan. 6 Capitol rioter Trump pardoned now faces a felony charge for allegedly threatening to kill Hakeem Jeffries, the House Democratic leader. (NPR)

Leverage: Trump's efforts to hurt blue states during the government shutdown are testing his legal authority to dictate federal spending.

Speaking of: One cut seems to target funding to rebuild the aging Sagamore and Bourne bridges, which connect Cape Cod to mainland Massachusetts. Trump's budget chief, Russell Vought, seemed to freeze the funding via tweet.

Rain check: Trump's second in-person summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss ending the war Ukraine is off after Russia's foreign minister said his country's demands haven't changed. (Politico)

BESIDE THE POINT

By David Beard

🧉 **18 things that are getting better:** From tastier coffee to lower GLP-1 prices, from social saunas to fewer car crashes, here's good news. See the full list. (Bloomberg 🎁)

⛰️ **Take me there!** One look at this photo and trust me, you'd want to see this new 2,000-acre New Hampshire wilderness preserve along the Appalachian Trail.

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🎨 **After Craigie On Main:** Here's Devra First's first look at the new restaurant at this iconic food space.

🍕 **17 standout slices:** From Armando's to Tenderoni's, here's how to celebrate National Pizza Month around Boston.

💌 **Love Letters:** It will be their first holiday season as a married couple and they're already getting pressure from family.

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This newsletter was edited by David Beard.

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